

## **The Q-List: A Faculty Fellows Research Agenda for the Profession**

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*The Q-List* is a project of the NASPA Faculty Fellows, which identifies broad lines of inquiry for the purposes of framing studies that are critical to advancing the profession and to understanding the students we serve. Although the Q-List is broadly focused it is neither exclusive nor reflective of any presumed order of importance. The scope of each topic is intentionally broad, yet admittedly not *all* important topics are part of this Q-List. Accordingly, the Q-List will evolve over time; questions and topics will be refined, dropped, and added. We expect that at least once every three to five years the Faculty Fellows, working with input from the community of student affairs scholars, will examine and update the Q-List.

The Q-List is provided to stimulate student affairs scholarship around themes or trends that significantly shape the context and conditions of student affairs work. The basic and applied questions within each topic area may provide strategic directions and hypotheses for advancing understanding and practice.

The Q-List is also intended to inform, for example:

- (a) Solicitation of research proposals
- (b) Priorities for NASPA Foundation research funding
- (c) Assessments of the status of current research in the field
- (d) Identification of areas of scholarship where data are limited
- (e) Design of targeted research symposia
- (f) Stimulation of new research agendas and programs

Finally, this work is an effort in collaboration with the NASPA Research Division and is intended to build bridges across the various NASPA groups, such as the annual conference program committee and association learning communities, as they pursue a shared agenda. We consider the questions that comprise the Q-List to be at the heart of our work in the coming years. The hope is that they will be interrogated and illuminated by student affairs professionals at all levels and influence the shape and quality of programming at the national conference. Thus we respectfully submit the following probes.

## **Topic 1: Returning Student Veterans**

Within the very near future, it is estimated, some 250,000 U.S. veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan will be returning to civilian life, some intending to re-enter the work force and many taking advantage of recent legislation (Post-9/11 GI Bill) to pursue further education. Significant numbers will do so with both physical and psychological injuries. As an urgent moral and practical imperative, post secondary institutions must gear-up to respond to this new wave of students with effective programs and services. Exemplar questions might include:

1. What are the characteristics of returning veterans on our campuses? By institutional type?
2. What previous experiences with formal education do these students bring with them as they prepare to re-enter the system?
3. What institutional or organizational barriers and challenges exist for those who come with physical and psychological injuries?
4. What programs are already in place and what practices best serve these students' needs?
5. What relevance do their transferable leadership skills and experiences have for the institutional goals of student engagement?

## **Topic 2: Student Mental Health**

Over the past decade increasing numbers students with extended histories of mental health challenges have entered higher education institutions. These students are typically already on psychotropic medications for various mental health issues. Some of these entering college students carry with them the effects of emotional trauma, experience with previous hospitalization, and expectations of mental health services.

1. What are some of the best practices that enable the success and student engagement of students with minor to severe mental health issues?
2. How do legal considerations impact our work as educators with the population of students with minor to severe mental health issues?
3. What education do faculty and other campus colleagues need about students' mental health issues?
4. How do we address the challenge of violence both in and out of the classroom across campus constituents?

### Topic 3: Student Development and Evolving Student Populations

The changing profile of today's students prompts us to critically assess our work. We wonder if our theories or preferred explanations are sufficiently accommodating of their emerging characteristics. New approaches and definitions of success warrant a new agenda of student development research, as illustrated in the following exemplars.

1. What generational shifts have occurred among American college students over the last few decades? Are our current theories on how students develop into more complex human beings (i.e. "more developed" individuals tend to be better citizens, more complex thinkers, more concerned with the welfare of others, etc.) relevant for current students? What new developmental concerns does this new generation present to us?
2. How can we better understand the unique developmental paths, for example, of Asian-American, Latino/a, African American, LGBTQ, Native American and multiracial students?
3. What student development factors and dimensions are insufficiently addressed in the literature (e.g., role of spirituality and/or religion and the evolving family structure) and what role do they play in current college students' development? Does their importance vary among differing student populations? How do they contribute to student success?

### Topic 4: Cost of Higher Education

Various national reports and the proposed report card for higher education (e.g., Measuring Up, 2006) identify access, completion, and affordability as three major areas of concern for higher education. An argument can be made *for a strong relationship among* the three. Another area of concern, raised in particular by critics of higher education, is the notion of a value-added educational experience, i.e., that the experiences students have while in college provide them a greater value beyond that which was expected.

1. How is the *cost* of attending college affecting the amount *of time* students can devote to their learning and/or pursuing learning opportunities? How do concerns about paying for college affect students' ability to be engaged in campus and academic life?
2. How do student concerns about college affordability affect the mix of student affairs services, programs, and policies?
3. What types of college experiences are more beneficial to students in times of personal and institutional financial constraints? What programs are already in place and what practices best serve these students' needs?
4. What is the role of student affairs educators in supporting timely (perhaps accelerated) progress toward graduation?
5. How does the under-resourced nature of community colleges impact their student affairs programs given the increasing enrollments in these often more affordable institutions?

## **Topic 5: Student Affairs and Community Colleges**

“The economy is changing at a breathtaking pace, and we need different skills these days,” Mr. Obama said, according to the *Wausau Daily Herald*. “In a moment when people are finding it harder and harder to get ahead, it’s time to call upon our community colleges once again.” (“Obama Says Community Colleges Key to Economy,” February 16, 2008). Presidential proposals include a \$4,000 tuition credit that would result in more affordable community college attendance. Student affairs educators are well-advised to follow the growing trends in the community college sector of higher education. Because past practice in student affairs has predominantly focused on four-year institutions and traditional-aged college students, this shift in research and practice is timely.

1. How do the shifting demographics and new populations of students (e.g., Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans, Cyber Generation) affect how student affairs is practiced in community colleges?
2. What innovative and cutting edge student affairs practices in community colleges have applicability for the entire field?
3. How does student affairs facilitate the articulation and transfer of credits to four-year institutions?
4. How do student affairs practices impact degree completion at two-year institutions?
5. How do student affairs educators facilitate increased student engagement and success at two-year institutions?

## **Topic 6: Emerging Technologies**

The use of new information and communication technologies provides increased flexibility, easy communication, and immediate resources and support to students. For example, social networking websites offer a broader communication network for students and have replaced much of their face-to-face communications. Today, college students prefer immediate communication styles; yet, most have little understanding of security issues and impacts on their interpersonal relationships. Meanwhile, data warehousing, data mining, and BI (business intelligence) analytics are emerging technological tools for higher education to learn more about the institution, students, and how well operations are working. Yet, we know very little about the impact of technologies on students and higher education institutions.

1. How does the use of technologies affect student affairs practice?
2. What are the challenges and benefits for student affairs to adopt new technologies?
3. What is the effect of technologies on student development?
4. What is the effect of technologies on student relationships?
5. What are the relationships between technologies and student learning?

## **Topic 7: The Role of Student Affairs in Institutional Sustainability and Viability**

The current and ongoing economic crisis provides challenges for all aspects of higher education. Student affairs units, traditionally a first place to look for resource reductions, are being stretched as budgets and staff are reduced. The retrenchment that has occurred during the recent economic crisis negatively impacts staff and faculty morale, productivity, and value within the institution. This is particularly the case in those student affairs divisions that have been traditionally under-staffed. Resources that might otherwise be dedicated to programs and services for students are frequently expended on external consultants, whose work is often treated as tangential to the everyday operation of the institution. As such, the money expended on these efforts can be a less than satisfactory use of limited resources.

1. What organizational models and leadership practices can lessen the impact of budget cuts on all areas of institutional effort?
2. What are the benefits and risks associated with using external resources or consultants rather than internal scholars and experts as student affairs divisions seek to clarify their purposes and institute change? Is the use of external resources or consultants cost effective? If so, how is its effectiveness measured?
3. What strategies are effective in sustaining staff morale, productivity, and institutional value of student affairs divisions during times of retrenchment?
4. What models can best be used to sustain quality, excellence, and viability of student affairs divisions in the future?

## **Topic 8: Globalization and Internationalization**

Globalization has resulting in nations increasing their higher education capacity to meet the increased demand for a highly trained and educated workforce. Internationalization of higher education has focused on providing nations whose higher education capacity is not yet sufficient to meet these new demands with access to a quality education through distance learning, branch campuses, joint programs, study abroad, and other learning opportunities provided by well-established higher education institutions. Both globalization and internationalization bring forth challenges and opportunities for student affairs educators. Three researchable questions related to these topics are:

1. What is the role of student affairs professionals in a national system where higher education is seen as a public good rather than a private benefit?
2. How are student affairs professionals meeting the current needs of international students related to student engagement and learning opportunities?
3. How does a student affairs/student development model fit and/or work under new cultural conditions, where institutional presence is either virtual or through proxies with institutions with a model that differs from the U.S. student affairs context?

## **Topic 9: Social Justice**

Student affairs educators have long taken the lead with diversity, cultural pluralism, and social justice efforts on college campuses. As student populations continue to increase in terms of diversity (e.g., race, sexual orientation, economic class) and empowerment (e.g., equal access to campus services, marriage rights, economic justice), student affairs educators will continue to adjust and further develop as a professional field.

1. How are national civil rights movements (e.g., GLBT marriage equality) influencing equality and equity regarding on campus student affairs practice?
2. How can student affairs affect institutional change regarding social justice?
3. What populations exist on college campuses that are not the focus of student affairs educators?
4. How do student affairs professionals' varying perspectives on diversity influence student affairs services, programs, policy, and environmental management?
5. How does student affairs maximize the educational attainment of all students?
6. What is student affairs educators' role in increasing access to all students across a range of institutional types?

## **Topic 10: History of Student Affairs**

As the current generation of institutional and professional association leaders approaches the latter stages of their careers in the student affairs field, it becomes a critical point of continuity to acknowledge, articulate, celebrate, and transfer their stories and record their history. Describing and appreciating the historical roots of the profession are important for framing and guiding its current trajectory. In the absence of such, student affairs risks losing its sense of purpose and direction. Exemplar questions might include:

1. What are the key events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that have shaped the course of student affairs in American higher education?
2. Who are the student affairs educators who have contributed significantly to the legacy of leadership in the field? Who has had critical impact on its understandings and practices? What has been the impact of their influence?
3. What is the historical genesis of the essential values and philosophical assumptions of the field?
4. What academic genealogies exist among student affairs preparation faculty and how have they shaped the principal teachings in the field?
5. What stories and accounts warrant preservation in the student affairs archives?